

## The History of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, an indigenous and integral Church of Africa is one of the oldest Churches in the world, if not the oldest one, and is a founder member of the World Council of Churches. It has branches in other parts of the world such as Jerusalem, Sudan, The United States of America, Canada, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Bermuda and England.

From the beginning the Church was affiliated with See of St. Mark of Alexandria. After Frumentius, her first Archbishop died, Egyptian bishops were appointed to head the Church; until 1959 a complete independence was granted. This connection was discontinued for a while because of the conquests occurred by Caliph Omar, a Moslim (634 - 644 A.D. ).

During these conquests the Byzantine Empire was pushed out of Syria altogether. Armenia was overrun, all Mesopotamia was conquered and Persia beyond the river. Egypt passed through much temptations. The Church is in full communion with Jacobite Church of Syria, the Church of Malabar in India, and the Armenian Church. It also maintains friendly relations with many other Christian Churches.

Protestant missionaries have been allowed in the country since the reign of Menelik II whereas during the times of Emperor Tewodros (Theodore) (1838) and Yohannes (John) (1886) they were not allowed. These missionaries have their greatest activities in the western part of the country where it borders with former European colonies. When one speaks of the E.O.C. one speaks directly about the nation and their civilization. Intelligence and justice of the country were originated in the Church; its Head being the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is the creator of art and crafts, literature, as well as creator of the secular and theological educational institutions and its curriculum. Until the time of Emperor Menelik II the Church was responsible for educating the nation. Even the Fetha Nagast (The

Laws of Kings) which is composed of Canon Law and Civil Law is the creation of the Church.

### Early Types of Worship in Ancient Ethiopia

No doubt the element of all kinds of forms of worship were practiced in the country especially the sun god which was widely known in Axum, one of Ethiopia's earliest Kingdoms. Sun god worship became widely practiced in Arabia in the town of Yemen. These Arabians a Cushite semetic people, migrated across the Red Sea to the South of Axum taking with them their sun god and moon worship and other cultures. Sun worship became widely practiced up to the point when the Queen of Sheba rose up during the era of King Solomon where she "admitted that she was a sun worshipper, though others adores stones, trees and grave images." Sun god worship was also current in Egypt.

It was also believed that during this early stage, - "the worship of the serpent was popular and Ethiopians offered sacrifices to it. This is confirmed to some extent by archaeological evidence found at Axum. On a stela at Axum an engraving of serpent is still visible today, though the worship of the serpent was spread through almost all the nations of the Middle East. We have reason to believe that this cult was introduced directly to Ethiopia; from Persia. The description in Avesta, the Sacred Book of Persia concerning this matter, is identical with the tradition found in Ethiopia".

Nevertheless, Ethiopia is the first African nation to appreciate and worship the One True God of Old Testament and adopted the Judaic element (1,000 B.C.). It was even said that the idea of worship of one God has been in existence earlier. This was confined to a limited number of families. Later this disappeared when a segment of the population strayed to all forms of worship.

The worship of the true God was officially announced and established by Queen Makeda on her return from her historic visit to King Solomon at Jerusalem. This powerful Queen had managed to

reign over parts of southern Arabia in Sabaea (Sheba), and because of this was titled, Queen of Axum and Sheba. Her long and strenuous journey to Palestine in Search of righteousness, was a symbol of great faith, and so our Lord Jesus Christ, over a thousand years later, spoke of her to the continuing generations, that she "shall rise up in the judgement with this generation and shall condemn it: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42). The Queen was then converted to the worship of the true God. Her conversion was the light she found in King Solomon's wisdom - the light who is God and therefore, greater than Solomon. Makeda stayed in Jerusalem for six months during which time her union with Solomon produced King Minelik I, who was born while she journeyed back to Ethiopia. She condemned other types of worship and introduced to her people the true light. About Makeda and her work, a wealth of information is to be found in the book of *Kebre Negest* (The Glory of Kings) from which most of this section is cited.

The *Kebre Negest*, States that when Menelik grew up he visited his father in Jerusalem; and came back home accompanied by Azarias, the son of Zadok the high priest and many other Israelites carrying with them the Ark of the Covenant, and placed it in the St. Mary of Zion Church in Axum, which is the birthplace of the Ethiopian civilization. The Ethiopian Falasha in northern Ethiopia who practice after the Judaism formula to this day, are to be descendants of those who accompanied Menelik. From this point of view Judaism and paganism were in effect in Ethiopia. The later was short-lived while the former became a channel for direction and introduction towards Christianity.

The Introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia (The Ethiopian Eunuch)

The country embraced Christianity and maintained the doctrine of Christ from the era of the Apostles to the present day, as it is narrated in (Acts 8:26-39). The history of St. Phillip the Apostle baptizing the Eunuch who was very much interested in religion, is of great interest for the Ethiopian Church history. This Eunuch was a man of high rank, the finance minister of Candace Queen of Ethiopia. Eusebius speaks of him as the first fruits of the faithful in the whole world. Irenius writes that he preached the Gospel to the Ethiopians. Other evidence is that during the time that the Eunuch preached Christianity, Ethiopian women wore crosses upon their heads signifying the recognition of the Crucifixion of Christ. Besides St. John Chrysostom witnessed that among those who were present at Pentecost (the birth of the Universal Church) were Ethiopians. In the history of the Church, it is further recorded that St. Matthew the Apostle preached the Gospel to the Ethiopians and won a few converts to the new doctrine and left the country.

#### Frumentius - First Bishop of Ethiopia

The book of St. Tekle Haymanot tells us that in the beginning of the fourth century after Christ, there came to Ethiopia Meropius, a philosopher (pilgrim) from Tyre, accompanied by two young men, Frumentius and Aedesius (Sidrakos). They were received graciously by Anbaram the high Priest. In that very night Meropius was ill with fever and after a few days he died. But the two young men were introduced to the King Ella-Amida; they grew up in the house of Anbaram, learning the customs and life-style of Ethiopia. Later Frumentius was chosen and was sent to Alexandria, then Patriarch Athanasius consecrated him bishop and sent him back. Upon arrival in Axum, he was called Abba Selama (Father of Peace). As the first Archbishop he preached the gospel throughout the country. The book of St. Tekle Haymanot tells nothing about whatever occurred in relation to Aedesius, but according to the

information given by Rufinus, a contemporary writer, he was made a priest in Tyre.

### Emperor Ezana (Edna) and Christianity

According to the western historians and writers the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia was in the fourth century during the reign of Ezana (320-356 A.D.) and Ezana became the first African King to have been a Christian and to have made Christianity the official religion of his empire. Nevertheless, Christianity was certainly known in the country before the time of Frumentius. Of course, Candace whose conversion had been due to the Eunuch becomes the first Christian Queen of the country.

The official declaration of the doctrine of Christ by Ezana was done not as a new introduction to the people, he did it to prove himself as the true Christian leader of the nation.

< Since then the Christian Church took great responsibility in maintaining an interest, guiding people in their responses to the true God and their relationship to him, and has become a guardian of education, and the country became a stronghold of Christianity. Also the nine Syrian Saints, who came to Ethiopia the fifth century A.D. made a large contribution to the growth of the Church in translating books from Greek, Hebrew, Syrian and other languages in Geez and in propagating the Gospel as well as setting up the monastic orders and schools.

### Problems Confronted by the Church

For hundreds of years the Christian Ethiopians had to fight for the maintenance of the Christian faith against internal and external foes. Such as the constant hostility of the Muslims against the Christian during their occupation of the Red Sea coasts including Yemen and Aden. The fiery onslaught of Ahmed Gran (the left handed ) a Muslim (1528-1540).

With the aid of Turkish troops, attacked the country from one end to the other, "and was able to oppose the Christians successfully. Over a decade the invaders pillaged the land affecting untold damage. Innumerable Monasteries and Churches were sacked and burned to the ground, ancient manuscripts and other works of art were stolen. The ancient Church of Axum was rased to the ground and the famous Monastery of Debre Libanos was entirely demolished". Another persecution of the Christian people occurred by Yodit (Judith) terrible in Tegray and in Amhara East (fire); when the Solomonian Dynasty was removed from Axum (A.D. 928-968) to the Zagwe Dynasty in Wolo province. According to the Ethiopian traditional sources she was of the Jewish faith. As it was her desire to exterminate the philosophy of Christianity, she was able to run out the Christian dynasty and cast down most of the historical places and Churches. Both Yodit and Ahmed Gran were native Ethiopians. The third and great problem was the desire of the Roman Catholic Church to bring the Ethiopian Christians under the jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome (1520-1632). Several missionary workers and bishops (Jesuits) were sent to Ethiopia for the purpose of conversion. Pedro Pais (Paes), Joao Burmudez, Andre de Oviedo, Francisco Alvares and D. Alfonso Mendez were the notable leaders among the missionaries. Their mission was the result of contact with King Manuel and King Joam of Portugal made by Empress Eleni and her son Lebna Dengel (Prester John) of Ethiopia, whose desire was to fortify their country against the Turkish menace then pending, by alliance with a Christian neighboring power, and to protect the holy land in which the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ is. They were very sad of the fact that all the Churches which were in the land of Egypt, Nubia and Syria were destroyed by the Moors. Among the notable missionaries Pedro Pais who reached Ethiopia in 1603. He lost no time in advertising the Church of Rome. He had brought Emperor Susneyos of Ethiopia; to the Catholic faith.

Pedro Pais ordered the people to kneel to him as representative of the Pope. Priests of the Ethiopian Church should be re-ordained by him and the whole population of the country was regarded as heathen if not rebaptized under the Catholic faith. Churches had to be reconstructed and altars were rebuilt in the Portuguese fashion. Meanwhile Susneyos issued a decree; death to be the penalty for those who refused to agree with the Chalcedonian formula which the Ethiopians refused to accept, in 451 A.D., the heart of the people was untouched, revolt after revolt broke out as civil wars went on without any prospect of ending, and thousands of man and women were killed. Such was the act of the Jesuits in Ethiopia. Susneyos died September 1632. His death was the end for the Jesuits. He was succeeded by his son Fasilades, during whose reign the Jesuits left the country by order.

Another attempt of conversion was made during the invasion by Mussolini (1935-1945) who had proclaimed a great colonial power in Africa. Mussolini declared that "for facism; Empire-building was manifestation of vitality and proclaimed in metaphysical vain, that the Empire in facist doctrine was not only a territorial military, but also a spiritual and moral expression".

The mission of the Portuguese Jesuits had brought several formulas concerning Christology. Two of which were Qebat (Anointing) and Tsegga (Son of Grace). There appeared a great controversy and division in the Church especially during the reign of Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868). Qebat states that Jesus became a perfect man and a perfect God by the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the Jordan River and not upon the incarnation. Tsegga states three births; eternal birth, of the Son from the Father; genetic birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary, and birth from the Holy Spirit during baptism. Such doctrinal formulas died out by decree of Emperor Tewodros.

## The Teachings of the Ethiopian Church

As is with all Oriental Orthodox Churches the teachings of the Church is founded on the Apostles experience of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Creator and Saviour of the World.

The first three ecumenical councils Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, and Epheus 431 which confessed the Son of God as being of substance with the Father and condemned Arius' formula are accepted by the Ethiopian orthodox Church, but the Church refuses to accept the Council of Chalcedon 451 presided by Pope Leo I which teaches the formula of the "two natures" against that of "one nature" the teaching of St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria. The Ethiopian Church holds that there were, two natures before incarnation, but only one after the union. The human nature was not dissolved in the Divine as Eutyches taught. But rather, the Divine made the human nature immediately its own. The word and the human constitute one nature, and union is established without confusion and without division. The Church rejects the idea of Eutyches, the monophysite who taught a confusion against the union of the human by the Divine, which was regarded by (Dyophysite) theologians to be the same with teaching of the Ethiopian Church and its sister Churches, which was done without investigation and hence ignorance because Eutryches' condemnation by St. Dioscorus is an evidence to the point. One can see that the words, "dysophysite" and "monophysite" as fitting to play a great role not between the oriental Churches which have nothing to do with such phrases but between the Caldedonian and Eutyches himself. The Church emphasises that all concerning Christ should be applied to His entire person as one Lord. Not to single out the "Human nature" as subjected to suffering hunger, passion etc., Properties peculiar to the human are referred to His Divine powers as God suffered, God was crucified, God shed blood, God died, and God was risen up for the salvation of all men.

The seven sacraments (mysteries) Baptism, Confirmation, penance,



Holy Communion, Unction of the Sick, Matrimony and Holy Orders are important in the teaching of the E.O.C. The administration of these sacraments is somehow similar to that of other Eastern Orthodox Churches in many ways. But with more native elements especially in hymary (chanting) and the custom of rites. Sacraments are holy ordinance through which the believer receives an invisible grace under the form of an outward sign. In the performance of each sacrament the Divine Majesty Himself is present. THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

Also the Church teaches other five pillars of Mysteries. They are the Mystery of the Trinity, Incarnation, Baptism, Eucharist and the Mystery of the Resurrection of the dead. These Mysteries are regarded by the Church as basic knowledge for all faithful and every Christian must know this. Fasting is strictly observed by all baptized members above the age of seven years. During lent; meat, and products of meat are prohibited.

Furthermore all faithful must keep the Ten Commandments and the six parables in Matt. 25:35-36, in order to inherit eternal life. In the second coming of Christ the dead will be raised and sinners will receive punishment according to their deed. So man is responsible for his own committed sins.

### The Church and its Recent History

From the beginning the Ethiopian Church was affiliated with the See of St. Mark of Alexandria, for a long period of time. After Abba Selama (father of Peace), known also as Frumentius, who was the first Archbishop of Ethiopia died, Ethiopian Bishops were appointed to head the Ethiopian Church. This continued until early the twentieth century. (it should be noted that through the history of the Church there was always an Ichege (Administrator) of the Church who was a native Ethiopian, and who would not try to supersede his Egyptian Peer).

This was done for several reasons: (1) The Ethiopian Church Fathers do not seek after their own glory, but that they had rather seen the glory of others. (2) The word, "A Prophet is without honour in his own country" (John 4:44) is much respected among the Ethiopians. (3) If a native person is consecrated Bishop, there was a fear that he, the Bishop might be tempted to becoming partial in his administration to those who are paternally related to him. (4) According to the dogma of the late fathers the Ethiopians had been discriminated from obtaining such positions.

It was said that Ethiopians should not consecrate Bishops from among themselves, such discrimination was done with no reason. For this and other reasons the Ethiopian Fathers stayed away from obtaining positions for a long period of time. Even today some fathers in several Monasteries would never accept any position. When it is given to the, they hide themselves somehow, until election day is over and until they are sure that the position is given to someone else. However, due to the difficulty in communication because of the language and other problems, it was very necessary for the Ethiopian Church to have native born Bishops who could, without difficulty, speak the National language, Amharic, including Geez, the classical language of the Church.

In 1926, after the death of Abuna Mathewos, Emperor Haile Selassie I, then Ras Tafari, began to negotiate for the appointment of an Ethiopian born Bishop to be head of the Church. It was agreed by His Holiness Patriarch Cyril V and by the Holy Synod of the Coptic Church, and in May, 1929, five Ethiopian Bishops were consecrated for the first time in the history of the Church. Unfortunately all five Bishops were murdered by the Italian fascists during the occupation of Ethiopia (1935-1940) by Mussolini. It was one of the plans of Mussolini to separate the Church from its link. About five other new Bishops were appointed by the Italians, to take the place of the victims, among whom Abba Abraham was set as Metropolitan.

These new Bishops were considered by the people of Ethiopia no less than the black shirt facists, who had done great damage upon the people and the Church. At the end of five years, when Emperor Haile Selassie returned from Geneva, having accomplished his mission and resumed his leadership, all five Bishops who had been appointed by the Catholic Church were excommunicated by Abuna Cyril of Alexandria.

After five tragic years, the Emperor sent a delegation to Alexandria to study the possibility of obtaining the full right for Abuna Querillos to consecrate Ethiopian Archbishop with the "Power to consecrate the Ethiopian Hierarchy". This demand was not met during the time of Patriarch McCarius III.

In December 1945, the Ethiopian Church expressed the desire to sever relationships with the Coptic Church if no satisfactory solution to the Ethiopian request could be found. However, in 1948, five other Ethiopian Bishops were consecrated, and one of them to act as Archbishop in the absence of Abuna Querillos. In 1950, Querillos, the last Egyptian born Archbishop died, and in 1951, Abuna Basilios, an Ethiopian was elevated to office and was consecrated in accordance with the agreement made with Alexandrian patriarchate. During the time of Cyril VI, the matter of the Ethiopian right was seriously discussed and in 1959, a complete independence was granted to the Church of Ethiopia provided that the two Sister Churches are canonically attached. The decision to take this action was the result of long effort by Emperor Yohannes and Emperor Hail Selassi I, within the Alexanderian See. Thus, the difficulty of language and problems of communication existed for a long period of time and the problem of distance of place owing to the time taken by journey between Cairo and Ethiopia, where the Church was frequently without a Bishop for a period of two years and more, especially during persecutions, has been solved. On the other hand we can see the difficulty which the Egyptian Fathers have had to

pass through to keep alive the Ethiopian Church which was surrounded by Muslims throughout its history.

April 6, 1971, the Church reached the highest position of Patriarchal See, when Abuna Theophilus was elected Patriarch in Addis Ababa, as the successor to Abuna Basilos the first Ethiopian born Patriarch who was consecrated in Alexandria and died in 1970. Of course this does not mean that the link with the Alexandrian Church was broken. It is rather done to acknowledge the proper right of the Ancient Christian Church.

Wesbihat le-amlake abewine

---

Why do the Ethiopian and the European (Gregorian) calendar differ?

The difference is both in years and days. According to the Ethiopian calendar, the current year is 1992, which is clearly eight (seven) years behind the Gregorian. The Ethiopian months are also lagging by seven, eight, nine or ten days depending on where the two calendars' months match. We have 12 months with 30 days each and a 13th month with five or six days. The 13th month is called "Pagumen" to mean the thirteenth. It is either six or five days whether the year is leap year. The hours of the day are not named and divided in the same way as in the European. For example, the European say 12 O'clock (AM) when it is actually 6 at midday. In the Ethiopian evenings are considered parts of the next day. In this article, it is attempted to give scriptural background to the 7(8) years difference in the calendars according to the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The difference lies in determining the exact date of the birth of Christ. According to Dionasius, a Roman monk, the birth of our

Lord Jesus Christ was 753 years after the foundation of the city of Rome. It is according to his calculation that the world joins the second millennium, in spite of the fact that, researchers many years after him have already discovered he has made a mistake by at least four years. Their argument was based on the Biblical clues given at Mt. 2:1 and Lk.3: 1-3, 22-23. In Mt. 2.1, it was mentioned that Jesus was born during the time of King Herod. The King died just after the birth of Christ. Meanwhile, it was also recorded that the king died 750 years after the city of Rome was founded. The other Gospel tells us that Jesus was 30 by the time he began his ministry. It was also mentioned that this was the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Historians proved that Tiberius came to power 765 years after Rome was founded. Fifteenth of his reign would be in 780, clearly showing a difference of four years from the calculation Dionasius has done. Thus the current European year would have been utmost 1996 AD only!

One would ask, "Why didn't they make these corrections? Why so far? ". One reason for this could be, that based on this calendar many historical records and other important dates and festivals have already been established. Correction would have meant losing of all these documents and reestablishing the dates, which might have created much conflict.

The Ethiopian Christians didn't base themselves on historical facts to decide the date on which Jesus was born. They used ages mentioned in many parts of the Holy Bible. According to their argument, God has nothing to do without reason. He must have meant something when He makes mention of these ages. If one contemplates on this he would draw a remarkable conclusion about this matter. Moreover, the birth of our Lord was foretold. The time was also fixed. Jesus was not born suddenly. When was it? It is really a big question. How did the Magi come to Jerusalem to worship the infant Jesus? Indeed, they were wise men, and had the prophecy in their tradition that the

King of the Jews, whose Kingdom will last forever, will be born in the holy land. It is also important to observe that the chief priests of Jerusalem were able to tell where he was born (Mt.2: 1-5). They knew the date (Dan. 9:24) and place (Mic.5:2). So we can be sure that there is sufficient information to fix the exact date just by following the stories in the Holy Bible and the prophecies.

From the St. Paul's, "When the time had fully come, God sent His son, born of a woman..." (Gal. 4:4) it was clearly indicated that there was a time period which human beings were supposed to wait. This was, according to Ethiopians, 5500 years. The same was mentioned in the tale of Abraham. This was a covenant given to Adam by God. When Adam was banished from Garden of Eden, he sought to get mercy of God. God told Adam that forgiveness of sin would not be obtained by his effort. He then promised him, "When five and a half days are full, I will be born of your offspring and save you". Note that one-day is one thousand years with God (2Pt.3: 8). When this time (5500 years) had fully come, Jesus was born. Then the Ethiopian started to calculate this time following the pace of Biblical history from Genesis up to the time of Jesus the Christ.

The task was not so easy. It requires a good understanding of how the times were mentioned in the Holy Book. It is presented below in a simplified form. The story begins in the fifth chapter of Genesis: (Gen. 5:3)

- \* When Adam became the father of Seth he was 230
- \* When Seth became the father of Enosh he was 205
- \* When Enosh became the father of Kenan he was 190
- \* When Kenan became the father of Mahalalel he was 170
- \* When Mahalalel became a father of Jared he was 165
- \* When Jared became the father of Enoch he was 162
- \* When Enoch became the father of Methuselah he was 165
- \* When Methuselah became the father of Lamech he was 187
- \* When Lamech became the father of Noah he was 182

\* The flood came at the 600 age of Noah 600

Sum 2256 years

Now, we finished the fifth chapter of Genesis. Let us now go to the 11th chapter of Genesis. Remember that here Shem's was selected only because Jesus Christ was in his line of generation.(Gen. 11:10)

\* When Shem became the father of Arphaxad 2 years after the flood 002

\* When Arphaxad became the father of Cainan he was 135

\* When Cainan became the father of Shelah he was 130

\* When shelah became the father of Eber he was 130

\* When Eber became the father of Peleg he was 134

\* When Peleg became the father of Reu he was 130

\* When Reu became the father of Serug he was 132

\* When Serug became the father of Nahur he was 130

\* When Nahor became the father of Terah he was 109

\* When Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran, he was 100

\* At 75 Abraham went to exile from his relatives and family 075  
sum 1207 years

The grand sum will be  $2256 + 1207 = 3463$  years.

These above numbers are clearly presented and need no deep knowledge of the whole story of the Old Testament. The remaining ones are found scattered so require a rather better knowledge.

From the 75th age of Abraham to Exodus 430 years

From Exodus to Samuel 513 years

From Saul to Solomon 120 years

From Solomon to exile to Babylon 394 years

And in exile 70 years

sum 1527 years

These sums up to  $1527 + 3463 = 4990$  years From here on the calculations are based on the verse on the Book of Daniel.(Dan. 9:24-25)

In this verse the coming of the Messiah has been clearly stated as 62 sevens'. It goes, "From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens', and sixty-two 'sevens' ". The first seven 'sevens' which will amount will be 49 years and the sixty-two others will be 434 years. It is also mentioned that Ezra went to Jerusalem with the exile captives of Israel to build Jerusalem and the Temple at the seventh year of the reign of Artaxees. (Ezra7: 6-9). The first sevens will be from the issuing of the word to the end of the rebuilding of the temple. Mind you, the temple has taken 46 years to rebuild (John (2:20) and the three year difference is the time when the Israeli were banned from building (Ezra 1:1-6 & 23-24). There is one subtle point to understand here. The sixty-two and the seven 'sevens' are not continuous. The beginning of this is the seventh year of the reign of Artaxees king of Persia (Ezra7: 6-9). This can be historically proved that it was the 76th year of the kingdom of Persia which includes the first seven 'sevens'. Therefore, these 76 years plus 434 (=62 x 7) it would be 510 years.

Finally, we reached the point. This total sum would establish the 5500 (=4990 + 510) years sought. The time God gave Adam to come to this World.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church based its calendar on this calculations.